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GC News is a forum for exchange on new HIV prevention options, especially for women.

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Global

South African Deputy President Motlanthe Gives Keynote at Women and Girl's HIV Prevention Summit South Africa



South African Deputy President Motlanthe greeting guests at the HIV Prevention Summit for Women and Girls, Johannesburg, South Africa

Several months of organizing by GCM staff and partners paid off on August 20-21 when more than 100 women's advocates, government officials and young women from across South Africa convened in Johannesburg for the HIV Prevention Summit for Women and Girls.

Under the auspices of the South Africa National AIDS Council (SANAC)'s women's sector, the event was sponsored by the Global Campaign for Microbicides; the Reproductive Health and Research Unit; the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) and South Africa's well-known Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

In a landmark show of support, South Africa's Deputy President Kgalema Motlanthe delivered the event's keynote address. Entering the hall accompanied by Deputy Health Minister Dr. Molefe Sefuralo and other senior government dignitaries, he received a typical South African welcome featuring a performance by young school girls and women delegates. Emphasizing that women are more vulnerable to HIV than their male counterparts, Mr. Motlanthe urged the various SANAC sectors to share best practices and work together to develop comprehensive prevention strategies that will reduce the incidence of HIV among women, in particular.

Media sources reporting on the Summit quoted the Deputy President as saying that "the development and implementation of tools that can be used by women to protect themselves, such as female condoms is an imperative" and that "advocacy groups such as the Global Campaign for Microbicides have done well in asking these questions."

To read the Deputy President's full address, click here: <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/WPS.pdf>



Young school girls welcoming the Deputy President with typical South African ululations

The Summit was convened to review progress being made on the South African National Strategic Plan, particularly as it relates to the prevention target to reduce by 50% the rate of new HIV infections by 2011. Delegates identified ways to strengthen the working relationship between government and civil society to ensure implementation of essential policies including:

- Meeting the need of female condoms by making them more easily and consistently accessible to women;
- Promoting research to develop new prevention technologies, including microbicides, PEP, vaccines, and PrEP;
- Addressing the HIV prevention needs of marginalized women, including lesbians, immigrants and sex workers; and,
- The need to develop a communication plan around male circumcision that packages it as a male sexual health procedure with implications for women, also.

To stimulate forward action on these issues, the Summit concluded by producing an advocacy agenda supporting a push for expanded access to female condoms; a strong presence of women's organizations in South Africa's PMTCT programs; and greater involvement of advocates and community groups in prevention research. These resolutions will be forwarded to SANAC and will inform the National HIV Prevention Policy for South Africa.

Research Update

Netting HIV: A "molecular condom" in our future?

On August 10, researchers at the University of Utah (US) published a study in *Advanced Functional Materials* about the apparent "in vitro" (test tube) success of their "molecular condom". A new microbicide candidate, this gel is comprised of molecules that join together when exposed to semen and, according to the article, "form a tight mesh" which then traps HIV molecules and provides a physical barrier between HIV and its target cells in the vagina. Just as a bed net blocks mosquitos from infecting

people with malaria, this gel proposes to form an invisible net that could block HIV from reaching target cells in the vagina and, thus, prevent infection.

For the gel to be effective, a woman would need to insert it before sex to allow the gel to coat the walls of her vagina. According to lead researcher Patrick Kiser, the gel molecules react when semen enters the vagina, changing its pH balance. They expand, join together and turn semisolid – coating the inside of the vagina with a fine mesh that HIV cannot penetrate. Since this mesh will also block sperm, the product is expected to be contraceptive. After sex, the vagina gradually returns to its usual pH, at which point the gel would re-liquify and leave the body with other vaginal secretions¹.

Although preliminary lab results indicate that the product may have microbicidal effect on its own; Kiser and his team are exploring the possibility of adding an antiretroviral (ARV) drug to the gel in order to enhance its effectiveness and ensure that any HIV entering the body is disabled before the microbicide is discharged. The combination of these physical and chemical [mechanisms of action](#) will only help to create a stronger barrier against HIV infection in women.

Kiser and his colleagues hope to have an improved product ready to enter clinical (human) trials within the next three to five years. Give the time needed for thorough clinical testing of its safety and effectiveness, the product (if successful) would not reach the market for several more years. For more information on how clinical trials work, please see GCM Fact Sheets, “Microbicides Research and Development”, at [http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/FS-R&D\[E\].doc](http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/FS-R&D[E].doc).

GCM and Partners in Action

GCM Launches Series of Microbicide Research Literacy Trainings



Trainers and Trainees from Nairobi Training

In June 2009, the Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM) conducted four microbicide research literacy trainings based on GCM’s new Microbicides Essentials e-course (www.HIVPreventionResearch.org).

The overarching purpose of the trainings was to enable HIV prevention research in Africa by building community understanding of and support for clinical trials conducting studies of new prevention technologies. Additionally, these trainings helped strengthen GCM’s relationships with local research staff, advocates, and community stakeholders across East Africa and Zambia.

The first training, held in Nairobi, Kenya, was application driven. GCM sent out a call for applications to HIV prevention advocates and research staff based in Africa and in response received a total of 170 applications for a 20-person training. The resulting two-day training was attended by clinical trial staff and civil society advocates from across East Africa and one participant from Nigeria representing the New HIV Vaccine and Microbicides Advocacy Society (NHVMAS).

Three additional trainings were conducted in partnership with two microbicide research sites—a Microbicide Trials Network (MTN) site at the Centre for Infectious Disease Research in Zambia (CIDRZ),

¹ To learn more about this change in pH balance, go to <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Vaginal%20Dreams.pdf> and scroll down to yellow highlighted section.

Lusaka and the Microbicides Development Programme (MDP) site located in Mazabuka, Zambia. Trainees included trial site staff, community advisory board/group members, and key community stakeholders.

GCM developed and utilized experiential and participatory learning exercises to ensure participant understanding of the content covered and to afford trainees the opportunity to practice answering questions and explaining difficult research concepts.

For example, to demonstrate the HIV lifecycle, training facilitators walked participants through the Microbicides Essentials e-course animations and then directed them in an HIV lifecycle skit using a series of props. Green paper plates were used to demonstrate gp120, an orange was used to represent reverse transcriptase, and blue and pink pipe cleaners to symbolize DNA and RNA. After one run-through with the facilitators directing, participants acted out the skit for a second time with participant volunteers taking over the direction. Afterwards, participants worked in small groups to develop skits demonstrating how various microbicides might work to prevent HIV. Skits covered a range of mechanisms of action including blocking agents, entry inhibitors and replication inhibitors.



Lusaka Trainees Act Out the HIV Lifecycle

Participants of the trainings overwhelmingly enjoyed the experience. One trainee from the Nairobi training exclaimed "What an experience this was! I have code named it 'science made easy'. I guess you all agree with me that this is one of the best trainings I have had in so many years of my working as an HIV/AIDS health communicator. How I wish it had come earlier than this!" While another from the Mazabuka training said "The material was covered in a simplified way which was easy to understand and also easy to share with other colleagues and the community...I liked the practical approach of the training where we are allowed to role play. It is a very good way of teaching one can't forget easily."

GCM is currently planning another microbicide research literacy training for applicants from Southern Africa.

Loading up and Launching New GCM Materials

GCM staffers are no strangers to loading up their suitcases with materials to distribute at meetings.



David Munar, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, and Anna Forbes, Global Campaign for Microbicides, stand up for Health Care Reform

Factsheets about PrEP, female condoms, microbicides and male circumcision often take precedence over that extra pair of shoes or snacks for the plane ride. As evidenced by Anna Forbes' recent trip to the 2009 National HIV Prevention Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, these sacrifices do not go unrewarded. "My luggage was so heavy that I had to pay extra. But I went with 175 packets and I came back with only 9!" she boasted.

With 3500 government, community-based and public health prevention workers in attendance, two dominant themes permeated the bi-annual conference hosted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Dr. [Carl Dieffenbach](#), [Director of NIAID's Division of AIDS](#) summarized these in his

² NIAID is the US Government's National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, the part of the National Institutes of Health primarily responsible for HIV/AIDS research.

conference blog as, “a sense of excitement and renewed enthusiasm for fighting the HIV/AIDS pandemic [were] buoyed by the new opportunities that the Obama administration brings. Conversely, there was also an underlying current of anxiety about how our country’s economic situation is affecting HIV prevention services.”

Coinciding with national debate over whether or not the US government proceeds with real national health care reform also lent urgency to the conference. As a founding member of the [Prevention Justice Alliance](#), the Global Campaign participated in an impromptu demonstration during one of the main conference sessions to remind participants of the essential link between expanding HIV prevention in the US and health care reform; and to urge them to call their Congress members on this issue.

With hundreds of sessions on the program— as well as plenaries, affinity groups and satellites – choosing what to attend was difficult. The Global Campaign focused on introducing its new factsheets and standardized PowerPoints on PrEP, female condoms, microbicides and circumcision to participants concerned about the ground-level implications of these interventions for women. “There was a huge uptake among those attending the PrEP satellite³”, said Forbes. “As soon as people heard that we had something in every-day language that made it easy to do presentations on PrEP – and answer people’s questions effectively – they couldn’t wait to get it,” she concluded.

These materials are available for download at www.global-campaign.org.

IAS Conference Award for GCM partner, African HIV Policy Network Europe

On July 22, the Scientific Programme Committee of the 5th International AIDS Society Conference awarded the [African HIV Policy Network](#) (AHPN) a Distinction on Merit award for their poster on building capacity among microbicide advocates by convening Buzz Cafés.

The poster '[Experiences of Buzz Café in Microbicides Advocacy in the UK](#)', presented by Eunice Sinyemu and Titise Kode, discussed the three Buzz Cafés held by the AHPN, and lessons learned regarding knowledge, skill building and expertise in microbicides advocacy.

London-based AHPN initiated these in collaboration with the UK African Microbicides Working Group, a coalition working closely with GCM. Based on a Kenyan model for engaging communities, Buzz Cafés bring working group members together over coffee and cake to build their knowledge and bridge the gap between research and advocacy through informal, but well-informed, conversation. This IAS award points to the need more investment in similar models globally to engage a wider audience in discussions about microbicides and other related prevention technologies. For more information, see GC News’ coverage of the first Buzz Café at <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/GCNews-98.pdf>.

Materials Update

New HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Society (NHVMAS) Releases New Compilation Report on Closed PrEP Trials

³ “Preparing for PrEP - A Stakeholder's Dialogue” was held on August 23 and co-hosted by the Center for HIV Identification, Prevention and Treatment Services, the Global Campaign for Microbicides, AVAC and several other organizations. The day-long session was attended by policy-makers, providers, consumers and community representatives.

The Global Campaign is excited to announce the release of a new report, *Oral Tenofovir Controversy II. Report of the tenofovir controversy from the perspectives of the community Voices from the field*, written and distributed by the New HIV Vaccine and Microbicide Advocacy Society (NHVMAS). The report documents community advocates' narration of the events around the oral pre-exposure prophylaxis tenofovir controversy that took place in five countries between 2004 and 2006, and intends to provide a space for their experiences to be respectfully shared and considered. The report is available for download from the NHVMAS website:

- **Full Report:** <http://www.nhvmass-ng.org/publication.php>

Of particular interest is Chapter 1, *The Cambodia Story*, written by Anna Forbes and Sanushka Mudaliar, which relays the events leading up to the cancellation of the trial by the Cambodian government in 2004 after protests from the Women's Network for Unity, the union of Cambodian sex workers. The full length case study, entitled *Prevention Prevention Trial Failures: A Case Study and Lessons for Future Trials from the 2004 Tenofovir Trial in Cambodia*, is available for download, along with a case study on the tenofovir trial in Cameroon, *Research Rashomon: Lessons from the Cameroon Pre-exposure Prophylaxis Trial Site*, from the Global Campaign's website:

- **Cambodia Case Study:** <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Cambodia.pdf>
- **Cameroon Case Study:** <http://www.global-campaign.org/clientfiles/Cameroon.pdf>

As with all GCM materials, please feel free to download these reports use them in any way that make them more widely available. They are provided as a free resource to the field. Feedback on these is also welcome and can be sent to info@global-campaign.org.

M2010 International Conference to Launch Website September 15, 2009

In preparation for the M2010 International Conference May 22nd-May 25th, 2010, the M2010 website is being launched September 15, 2009. For information on registration, scholarships, abstract submissions, and additional conference information, please go to the following link: <http://microbicides2010.org/>

What is GCM Doing this Month?

GCM to Present at the Regulatory and Ethics Meeting 15 September, Nairobi, Kenya

The Global Campaign for Microbicides (GCM) will make a presentation on the Standard of Care for HIV Prevention trials during the upcoming Regulatory and Ethics Meeting organized by the International Partnership for Microbicides (IPM) on Tuesday, September 15, 2009 at the Safari Park Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya. The aim of the presentation will be to provide an overview of the mapping work that GCM conducted in 2007 across 6 large scale microbicides trials in four African countries and highlight the recommendations emerging from this mapping activity. Through this, GCM hopes to contribute to furthering the ethical debate on the complex questions that face researchers in deciding what care to offer to trial participants and their communities